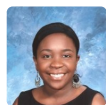
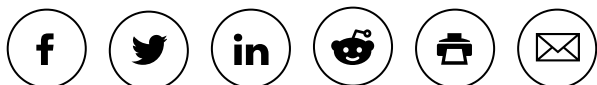


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February 25, 2021

'Balance has tipped': It's time to ease up on visitation regulations, nursing homes tell feds

[Danielle Brown](#)

LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan

Long-term care providers are calling on the federal government to remove regulations that base nursing home indoor visitations on COVID-19 positivity rates in the area now that vaccine coverage is widespread for facilities.

LeadingAge made its case in [a letter](#) Wednesday to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Disease Control and Prevention and Domestic Policy Council. It called on the agencies to reconnect residents with visitors by rethinking policies.

"COVID-19 vaccines are the most significant development of the pandemic and real progress has been made in vaccinating nursing home residents. It is time for nursing home visitation policies to catch up.

As cases have declined, the balance between caution and isolation has tipped,” LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan said in a statement.

Earlier this month, CMS Director for the Division of Nursing Homes Evan Shulman said during a call with LeadingAge members that it was “too early” to update nursing home visitation guidance despite significant declines in COVID-19 cases after widespread vaccinations.

LeadingAge, however, noted that while providers have “rallied around residents” to provide safe visits and activities for residents, social isolation is still taking an extreme toll.

“With the right visitation policies, we can safely reduce isolation — and the physical, cognitive and emotional effects that accompany it — while continuing to fight this virus,” Smith Sloan said.

“New visitation policies must include parameters — such as designated visitation spaces, controlled length of visit, and limits to the number of visitors — that ensure safety, since the coronavirus threat remains,” she added.

The letter also asks federal leadership to consider expanding visitation in outbreak situations, such as options that allow visitors to enter during an outbreak if they can provide proof they’re fully vaccinated against COVID-19. It also requests that community prevalence-based restrictions be removed in order to allow more indoor visitations, regardless of what surrounding county positivity rates are.

Providers also want assurances nursing homes will continue to be prioritized for vaccine access through the Retail Pharmacy Program, and that the federal government will continue to supply all available resources, such as point-of-care tests and increased allocations, to support expanded visitation.

In return, LeadingAge pledged that providers would establish visitation plans that include core principles of COVID-19 infection control principles, encourage informed consent and increase rates of staff vaccinations.

The provider group added that it’s not advocating a full return to pre-pandemic visitations. It also vowed to continue to screen all visitors for COVID-19 and practice infection-control principles.

“We know it’s not going to be pre-pandemic visitation. That’s just not going to happen right now,” said Jodi Eyigor, LeadingAge’s director for nursing home quality and policy, during a group call Wednesday. “But we’re hoping visitation will become a little more flexible soon.”

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